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"Orpheus' Sermon": Making a Case for an *Antiquer* Dickinson

Eric Athenot

1 Readers of Emily Dickinson's letters and poems will have noted their constant stream of classical references and allusions. While her Puritan legacy has been amply commented upon, both the context in which the poet acquired her classical culture and the breadth of her classical allusions have been largely ignored by biographers and critics. While insisting on Dickinson's relationship to "the Valley's tradition which she inherited and the dynasty into which she was born" (Johnson, 1955, 7), Thomas H. Johnson's biography does not offer one single comment on her classical studies. Richard B. Sewall, who is to be credited with having compiled the first truly "interpretive" and thoroughly researched biography of the poet, writes in glowing terms about Dickinson's time at Amherst Academy:

> If ever there was a blossoming period in her life, full and joyous, the years at the Academy—seven in all, with a few terms out for illness—were it. This remarkable school with its enlightened curriculum; its young and enthusiastic administrators and teachers, and its close association with Amherst College, was an influence of first importance in Emily's formative years (Sewall, 1974, 337).

2 He reprints a letter, sent to parents by the Academy a dozen years before the poet and her sister Lavinia enrolled, revealing how centrally classics featured in the girls' education:

> There is both a classical and English department. The learned languages will be taught in such a manner as to make the study of text-books a study of interesting facts and sentiments, as well as of words and their grammatical relations. Instead of confinement to the dry details of agreement and government, there will be constant endeavours to excite interest by adverting to ancient literature, politics, manners and customs (Sewall 1974, 338).

3 Sewall further remarks—a point of no small import to this article—that "'[t]he classical Department,' which Emily entered in 1842, offered studies that began with Nepos and Caesar and took the usual route through Vergil, Cicero, Sallust, and the Greek Testament" (349). The teaching of the New Testament in its original Greek version

demonstrates philological preoccupations on the part of the Academy looking forward to the impact German Higher Criticism was to have on American biblical scholarship in the last decades of the century. Sewall, furthermore, insists on Dickinson's fondness for her Latin teacher, Helen Humphrey, "the older sister of Emily's great friend and correspondent, Jane," who "had much more than a professional relationship with Emily" (340). Yet, while he is very good at referencing scientific allusions in the poetry, he remains utterly silent about Dickinson's relationship to classics and classical languages.

4 A much-discussed article, published in 1978 by Lois A. Cuddy, analyses Dickinson's bold rhetorical innovations as resulting from her familiarity with the Stoddard and Andrews Latin textbook used at Amherst Academy. The article contends that "Dickinson's forms —the functional metres, capitalization, and internal punctuation—are integrally linked to Latin quantitative metrics and caesurae" (Cuddy, 1978, 74). Quoting a couple of Ovid lines printed in the textbook, Cuddy concludes that "when Dickinson reverses the syntax and deletes words, she is using the Latin textbook as her guide in recreating poetry modelled after some of the greatest writers in Western history—the poets of the Latin Golden Age" (76). Yet, when reviewing such tropes as *anastrophe* or *hypallage*—listed and analysed in the Latin textbook and accommodated by Dickinson—, one cannot but conclude that, even if they are found in condensed form in the poems, such tropes had undeniably been part and parcel of English-language poetry for centuries and that their presence in Dickinson's poetry cannot be convincingly accounted for through her mere exposition to Latin prosody.

5 The present article approaches Dickinson as a poet who seized upon the classics and the Latin language as correctives, if not potent antidotes, to the long-lasting impact of Calvinism upon her native region and her family.[1] Dickinson's deceptively discreet yet constant reliance on classical references and languages will be examined not as part of an escapist strategy or as evidencing the kind of reactionary politics too commonly and too easily thrust upon her in standard Dickinson scholarship. This feature will on the contrary be regarded as contributing the tentative portrait of a creator fully immersed in the intellectual debates agitating her times and keenly aware of the ideological—and gendered—significance of the classics in post-Jacksonian America, during the Civil War, and beyond. The reliance on the antique throughout Dickinson's poetry, it will be suggested, is part and parcel of a counter-teleology unfolding through the years in her verse, in which an increasingly scathing rebuttal of New England Calvinism combines with the rejection of an essentialist and fundamentalist version of history and the lessons her male contemporaries insisted on deriving from it.

Dickinson as a classical scholar

6 The following statement by Caroline Winterer could well have been made about Dickinson herself: "Next to Christianity, the central intellectual project in America before the late nineteenth century was classicism" (Winterer, 2002, 1). Winterer paints the picture of a society "dazzled [...] by ancient Greeks and Romans," and "quarr[ying] the classical past for more than two and a half centuries" (1). She is keen to show that this influence was not limited to men:

> American women were denied access to higher education until the second half of the nineteenth century, and only a small proportion in the antebellum era learned

> the ancient languages in seminaries or academies or from private tutors at home. Yet so pervasive was the habit of looking to antiquity that we find classical motifs and images forming a part of the ideological vocabulary of educated American women even in the eighteenth century (Winterer 2002, 2-3).

7 Dickinson was fortunate enough to learn Latin in a forward-looking academy, about which Winterer has this to say:

> Among the remarkable transformations in the early national period was the proliferation of female academies and seminaries between 1798 and 1850. Equally significant was the flourishing in those academies of the study of classical antiquity. [...] Classical learning became not just a badge of middle-class, female accomplishment, but a portal of entry into a rudimentary public life of writing and speaking (146).

8 What Dickinson's relation to public learning was to be does not exactly fit Winterer's portrayal but classical learning did greatly contribute to her polish as a poet. Far from being a backward-looking frame of reference, Winterer argues that "well into the nineteenth century the Greco-Roman past represented the dazzling avant-garde in science, art, and literature" (2). It is known, from Alfred Habegger, that Dickinson studied Latin for at least three years, from 1842 to "at least May 1845, according to a letter of that month, suggesting that in all (ignoring the terms spent at home) she had three and possible four years of the language," a period of learning which enabled her to acquire "a substantial foothold in the *Aeneid*" (Habegger 2001, 140).[2]

9 Dickinson's earliest extant lines smack of classicism (reminiscent, in the speaker's reliance on the muses, of the opening of the *Iliad* more than of the *Aeneid*):

> Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine,
> Unwind the solemn twine, and be my Valentine! (Dickinson, 1999, 15)

10 The use of leonine rhyme and alexandrines—instead of pentameters—points to a poet resisting the conventions of English-language poetry from the start of her career. The alexandrine, a line devised in thirteenth-century France and later associated with French classicism, shows Dickinson not as honing her poetic skills through imitation—as most poets are reputed to do—but as approaching poetry from a crooked angle. Dickinson, as early as 1850, clearly exhibited a keen awareness of poetry as part of a historical development to which she was about to contribute so significantly and in so unique a fashion.

11 Dickinson's disruptive strategy might be said to be inherent in the definitions Noah Webster gave, in 1844, of the adjective and noun *antique*, and to which Dickinson will be shown strictly to adhere in her poetry. Webster conferred a dynamic power to the adjective *antique* by ultimately placing it on the side of the unconventional. The first two definitions cover a relatively familiar ground:

> 1. Old; ancient; of genuine antiquity in this sense it usually refers to the flourishing ages of Greece and Rome; as an antique statue.
> 2. Old, as respects the present age, or a modern period of time; of old fashion, as an antique robe.

12 The third, however, links *antique* to *antic* (actually defined with this spelling six pages up): "Odd; wild; fanciful; more generally written antic." To go from *antique* to *antic* is to tread the ground Dickinson may be considered to have travelled from the opening lines of her first extant poem to the far-reaching disruptions carried out by her later and better-known poems.

13 From Athens, in Fr 1606,[3] to Thessaly, in Fr 491, from Amphitrite, in Fr 255, to Prometheus, in Fr 1143, Dickinson's texts first seem to approach the antique from a well-known perspective. They apparently direct the reader towards a familiar figure, story or place that he or she is expected to be in a position to identify and whose relevance to the poem he or she is expected to work out by him- or herself. Depending on whether the reader is able to identify the classical allusion or not, the latter's presence in a poem can be regarded as a gesture of proffered complicity or, in the event of this complicity being impossible, as one more obstacle to a full understanding of the lines.[4] Dickinson's classical references serve two functions at least. First, the elements alluded to—generally by being simply named—test the reader's culture. By doing so, they reinforce Dickinson's metapoetic strategy. In Fr 76, for example, Cato stands for the practitioner of a kind of public rhetoric, which the poem's speaker declares to be inferior to nature's power of speech (more of which at the end of this article):[5]

> My flowers turn from Forums –
> Yet eloquent declare
> What Cato couldn't prove me
> Except the birds were here! (Fr 76)[6]

14 The well-known myth of the Golden Fleece features in Fr 910 as an example of the pointlessness of quests, with the quotation marks hinting at the various narratives inspired by the myth—from Ovid to Dante, and here taking on the form of a play in five acts—or, perhaps, as the poem seems to make plain, as a sign of the speaker's rejection of myth as untruth:

> Finding is the first Act
> The second, loss,
> Third, Expedition for the "Golden Fleece"
>
> Fourth, no Discovery –
> Fifth, no Crew –
> Finally, no Golden Fleece –
> Jason, sham, too. (Fr 910)

Dickinson's Antique Paradigms and the Civil War

15 Dickinson's classical allusions and references prove to be even more arresting when, as often as not, she combines them with deceptively conventional Calvinistic considerations. Although in doing so she borders perilously close to blasphemy, such an attitude may be regarded as an offshoot of women's classical training such as analysed by Winterer. The latter is of the opinion that "classicism could thrive in the female academies in part because of the seamless melding of pagan texts with Christian ethics that had long characterized women's classical reading" (Winterer 2007, 152). This, if we are to believe her, was in keeping with the coexistence, noticeable ever since the creation of the American republic, of Christian revelation and paganism, a seemingly paradoxical situation made possible by the general perception of the superiority of the former over the latter. "These two traditions," Winterer writes, "the biblical and the classical, nevertheless coexisted in American higher learning throughout the century. Athens and Jerusalem had everything to do with one another, although they occasionally conflicted" (9).

16 This scholarly tradition may account for Dickinson's ironic juxtaposition of Christian and classical elements in many of her poems. Such a juxtaposition, as will be seen shortly in Fr 524, not only leads to an undermining of Calvinistic tenets but frequently appears to lay bare an ethical code presented as exclusively—and in the case of the Civil War, violently—devised by men. The selfless sacrifice of Spartan soldiers at the battle of Thermopylae may, in this respect, be seen in Dickinson's poetry as one of the most arresting examples of such a strategy of ethical deconstruction through classical references.[7]

17 Fr 1584, for example, offers a highly ironic conclusion through the reference to Thermopylae:

> "Go tell it" – What a Message –
> To whom – is specified –
> Not murmur – not endearment –
> But simply – we obeyed –
> Obeyed – a Lure – a Longing?
> Oh Nature – none of this –
> To Law – said Sweet Thermopylae
> I give my dying Kiss – (Fr 1584)

18 The poem alludes to the famous epitaph of Simonides laid, as recorded by Herodotus (228), on the site where the last soldiers gave their lives:

> "Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by,
> That here, obedient to Spartan law, we lie."

19 The poem appears to be a stuttering dialogue—note the many dashes—between Nature and "sweet Thermopylae," a somewhat oxymoronic reference to a murderous battle in which no fewer than 1500 men are reported to have died. This sweetness may be construed to imply that war, by causing death, entails the disappearance—the irrelevance?—of human laws just as armed conflict carries them out to their fullest, lethal potential. The battle may also be "sweet" because the poem kisses away the historically sanctioned illusion that human laws are eternal and unvarying—thereby rejecting as pointless the human sacrifice these laws brought about in 480 BC, and again, as will be seen shortly, in the Civil War. The present simple—instead of the more logical past—points to this as a timeless truth. The poem appears to have been written in 1882, or some seventeen years after the Civil War. According to Victor David Hanson, the battle of Thermopylae became known down the ages as the allegory of European freedom fighting against Asian despotism,[8] a reading which Dickinson seized on to address the topic of male heroism in the US during the Civil War.

20 Written in 1863—the year Gettysburg was fought—, Fr 524 tells another story, in which the reference to Thermopylae, reflecting as it does on contemporary events, serves precisely to complicate, if not qualify, the traditional perception of soldierly sacrifice. This poem stands as perhaps one of the aptest illustrations of Dickinson's art of paradox, if not of antiphrasis. On the one hand, it seems to offer a familiar celebration of Civil War casualties by alluding to a battle of epic fame. On the other, this allusion may equally be seen subtly to befuddle the reader once he or she becomes aware of the ironic gender game played by the poem's speaker in commenting on the Christ-like dimension granted to the Union's "unsustained Saviors":

> It feels a shame to be Alive –
> When Men so brave – are dead –
> One envies the Distinguished Dust –

Permitted – such a Head –

The Stone – that tells defending Whom
This Spartan put away
What little of Him we – possessed
In Pawn for Liberty –

The price is great – Sublimely paid –
Do we deserve – a Thing –
That lives – like Dollars – must be piled
Before we may obtain?

Are we that wait – sufficient worth –
That such Enormous Pearl
As life – dissolved be – for Us –
In Battle's – horrid Bowl?

It may be – a Renown to live –
I think the Men who die –
Those unsustained – Saviors –
Present Divinity – (Fr 524)

21 The surface meaning of the poem could probably be summed up through the following question: "Are we, civilians, worth the price paid by our Christ-like soldiers, who sacrifice their lives in order to save us and U.S. democracy?" The intricacy of the wording, however, is compounded by the deceitful reference to Sparta and Thermopylae in stanzas two and four. The poem's opening lines express not so much a feeling of shame at being alive as one that appears to endorse the conventional—and through the impersonal pronoun *it*, abstract and shallow—Christian feeling that being alive "feels a shame." As a corollary, being dead as a result of act of selfless bravery appears to be preferred to being alive as the consequence of other men's sacrifice.[9] This, if taken at face value, will not come as too much of a surprise to readers familiar with Dickinson's Civil War poetry.[10]

22 The transition from stanza one to stanza two prepares the reader for the convoluted allusion to the afore-quoted epitaph of Simonides celebrating the Spartans' sacrifice and its celebration down the ages. In Fr 524, Fr 1584's "sweet Thermopylae" is metamorphosed, through a metaphor taken from chemistry, into "Battle's – horrid Bowl." The tortured syntax seems to mimic the amputation inflicted upon the Union by the seceding Southern States (see ll. 3-8).[11] Such a striking form of amputation occurs on the word "headstone," broken into two ("a *head* / Such a *Stone*") and is compounded by the many nonrecoverable deletions at work in the second and the final quatrains.[12]

23 The reference to Sparta, however, is all but conventional and may owe in part to Lydia Maria Child's *Philothea*, published in 1836—some fourteen years before the country's tensions were to come to a head over the Fugitive Slave Law. Child's novel depicts Spartan society as brutal towards its helots, when Athens, a flawed, Jacksonian-type democracy, is praised for being a haven to runaway slaves. Child's Sparta's "views of slavery and slaves," Winterer writes, "resembled precisely those of the antebellum South" (Winterer 2007, 174).[13] The dust accumulating over the Spartans' epitaph may therefore ironically suggest that their noble sacrifice was but the selfish expression of free men fighting to preserve their own liberty. In doing so they may be seen to have

upheld unjust laws and to have acted out of the base fear of being reduced to the condition of their own helots.

24 But, what is more, Fr 524 should not be read too hastily as paying unqualified tribute to the Union dead. Paul Crumbley, writing of Dickinson's "refusal to acknowledge history as the material expression of divine order," makes a convincing case for the poet refusing "to view historical processes that had consistently excluded women from positions of public authority as providing adequate precedent for female self-expression in a democratic age" (Crumbley 2010, 70). The poem's running financial metaphor may serve as a reminder of how unjust the Union's own war policy was, when well-off men could buy their own way out of the conflict and others could not afford that exemption. A few months after this poem was written, Dickinson's own brother, Austin, was precisely to take advantage of this policy and pay $500 for a substitute.[14] This biographical fact seriously undermines the Union's claim to "Renown" by pointing to the social inequalities at its core. The running economic metaphor that appears to celebrate the Union soldiers' sacrifice may be there precisely to indict the unjust economic foundations underlying American democracy in a time of war and beyond. Is benevolent Athens, in this respect, really better than brutal Sparta? The reversal of capitals, from "Us" to "unsuspected – Saviors", may not simply be understood to reproduce in writing the loss of a firm Union binding the different states together—symbolised by the initials US. This reversal may also be read as mirrorring on the page —albeit in hand-written form since the poem was never printed in Dickinson's lifetime —the idea that this Union can only come into being—can only made '[p]resent''—through the act of *giving*, something the Union soldiers teach the rest of society by paying with their own lives.

25 This running economic metaphor may, to echo Crumbley's argument, be read as the choice weapon wielded by a woman who had taken men's exclusion of women to its furthest possible logical development by excluding herself almost completely from social life in favour of a secluded writing life which gave form to the poems that we know.[15] It is "Men" who are "so brave" in stanza one. The final lines, though, if one follows the logic of truncation at play in the poem introduced through the afore-mentioned "Head / The Stone"/ "Headstone" pun, may paradoxically be seen to raise questions about women's relationship to the Union's "unsustained – Saviors". If one reverses the word order from "The Men who" to "The who Men" ("the women", perhaps appearing spectrally in stanza two in the pronoun "Whom"), one will end up with a poem offering an entirely different conclusion from the one it appears at first to reach. The pronoun *I* appears just once in the poem, in the very same line as the words just quoted. This final twist may express a woman's horror at the sacrifices women, and not just men, had to consent to in a war whose course was left entirely to the latter, "so brave" or, as in Austin Dickinson's case, not "so brave." Thermopylae, in this context, may serve as a reminder that women on both sides of the conflict had no more political rights than slaves. It was women therefore, just as much as male soldiers, by being kept on the margins of a slaughter over whose course they had no constitutional power and which made them victims too, who could be viewed ultimately to teach the ultimate lesson in selfless "divinity."

Being antiquer, or anachronism as female translation

26 Dickinson uses the adjective *antique* in no fewer than six poems.[16] She does not shy from providing it with a superlative form which traditional grammar usually denies it.[17] In a handful of poems, *antique* is imbued with somewhat negative connotations, while *ancient* (an adjective used five times throughout the poems and granted a comparative form)[18] seems to ring more positive.[19] In Fr 311, however, *ancient* and *antique* are used as variants for each other in the phrase "Some Ancient [Antique] Brooch". One will note that, in this particular instance, in order for either word to stand for the other, one will need to stress the first syllable of *Antique*. This brings us back to the third of Webster's definitions of the term: "Odd; wild; fanciful; more generally written antic," and its trochaic stress pattern.[20]

27 Dickinson's later poems are more compact in form and increasingly scathing towards Calvinism. Fr 1577, in this respect, sounds like a direct echo of Sarah Grimké's feminist critique of the translation of the Bible by generations of men. In 1838, she had expressed the opinion that the Bible was the product of male translators and that women, once they had access to classical languages, would be sure to unearth new, egalitarian readings repressed by men: "[I] must enter my protest against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentary thereupon. I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have" (Grimké 1838, 16). Dickinson knew neither Greek nor Hebrew but had studied Latin. She may have attempted a "commentary" of her own in Fr 1577:

> The Bible is an antique Volume –
> Written by faded Men
> At the suggestion of Holy Spectres –
> Subjects – Bethlehem –
> Eden – the ancient Homestead –
> Satan – the Brigadier –
> Judas – the Great Defaulter –
> David – the Troubadour –
> Sin – a distinguished Precipice
> Others must resist –
> Boys that "believe" are very lonesome –
> Other Boys are "lost" –
> Had but the Tale a warbling Teller –
> All the Boys would come –
> Orpheus' Sermon captivated –
> It did not condemn –[21]

28 The poem's blasphemous character is immediately apparent, not least because of the Holy Spirit having been replaced with "Holy Spectres." The lines offer a jumbled version of sacred history that culminates in the most "antique" figure among all those quoted here, and a pagan, mythological one at that—Orpheus. The various biblical references are listed anachronistically (Judas coming before David, for example), and are provided with sarcastic secular rewordings, mixing religious, literary and private history. This may point to Dickinson regarding the Good Book, like the *Aeneid* or the *Iliad*, as no other than a classical text of literature, no other, indeed, than "an antique Volume," which, historically speaking, it is. Among the most ironically anachronistic

portraits are "David – the Troubadour" or "Judas, the Great Defaulter," while "Eden – the ancient Homestead" may be an oblique reference to the estate known by this name, built by her grandfather, Edward, and where Dickinson spent most of her life. As to the "lost" boys, one cannot but be reminded of Dickinson's own refusal to give in to the religious pressure exerted on her at Mount Holyoke, a harrowing decision to which she adhered all her life, and which caused her at the time to be listed among those "without hope" (Sewall 1974, 358-67). This commitment to truth may explain that just as, in Fr 524, the dust accumulating on the epitaph at Thermopylae betrayed a respect for brutal slaveholders and was proof of male history's selective memory, so here the Puritan condemnation of other people's sins is humorously branded in this poem as "distinguished" (both exclusive, and affecting other people).

29 For Dickinson, the Bible's antiquated nature appears clearly to be due to its male authors (and not, as in Grimké's outburst, mere translators). Or, to quote the end of Fr 1094, "[I]t an Antique fashion shows – / Like Costumes Grandsires wore." The poem eventually advocates Greco-Roman mythology and concludes with the reference to "a warbling Teller," the quasi-oxymoronic expression of the speaker's higher (and feigned?) regard for natural artistry.[22] This higher form of singing, as we saw at the beginning of the article, may be what Dickinson aimed at all her life, with a view not to conforming to the description of Sappho provided by Higginson[23] but to becoming a female Orpheus, thereby freeing women from their position as minor poets or Eurydice-type lyrical objects.[24] Accordingly, the last three letters of the concluding verb —"condemn"—offer a recombination of the word "men," whose version of history the present poem may be read as rejecting and rewriting through anachronistic juxtapositions. In this regard, in this poem as in Fr 524, men are "condemned" by being conned out of their monopoly over poetic creativity through this female poet's ambiguous yet ultimately captivating warbling.

30 Poetry could only hope to be revitalised through a return to natural artistry, which would recapture the ancient art of lyric singing. The poet, in full command of playful anachronism, summed this up in an earlier poem[25] by punning on the word "opera," which, from a plural word in a classical language—Latin—, evolved, apparently unchanged but now singular, into a handful of modern languages. "Opera" may in this respect have enabled Dickinson to crystallise the ever-newness and ever-adaptability of the antique. A Protean word if there ever was one, it used to be plural and is now singular, it refers to an art-form mixing all other art-forms of the nineteenth century while referring to the actual building in which it is performed.[26] For the speaker in Dickinson's poem to boast that her art is "full as Opera" may simply point to the depth and breadth of her achievements. The antique, it is not to be doubted, played a crucial role in enabling her to "dance upon [her] Toes" (Dickinson 1999, 175) and turn her into a modern classic.

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NOTES

1. Biographers on the whole offer no evidence of Dickinson having studied Greek. Was she aware of the Greek New Testament classes at all? If she was, she never mentioned them in her letters.
2. Habbeger bases his argument on the copy of "[a] surviving school edition of Vergil bearing the written names of "Miss Emily Dickinson" and Abby Maria Wood" (Habegger, 2001, 142).
3. This article has adopted the convention of referring to the poems in Franklin's edition as "Fr + the poem's number."
4. Etymology reminds us that *alludere* means "to play or joke with," implying the reader's participation in the process.
5. Cato's presence during Revolutionary times has been chartered by Eran Shalev in his important book, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores*. He dwells in great detail on the Roman figure's ubiquity in post-Revolutionary America. Of particular note is the use of his name as a pseudonym by one of "the twenty-nine original (Massachusetts-based) writers" who, from September 5, 1787

and February 12, 1788, argued in pamphlets over the Constitution. "Cato and Caesar" embodied conflicting positions about federalism, the former standing for staunch republican virtues, the latter for anti-republican ambition. This opposition, Shalev notes, was how "Roman history was re-enacted in America" (Shalev 2009, 170-8).

6. The same philosopher reappears in Fr 149, through an allusion to his daughter Portia, wife to Caesar's assassin Brutus. About Portia, Shalev notes that "American women [in the late colonial period] could have identified with and embodied classical virtues with the aid of protagonists such as Portia, Cato's daughter and Brutus's wife who committed suicide when her republic—and husband—were destroyed." (Shalev 2009, 26). Shalev also mentions "Abigail Adams's self-fashioning as "Portia in her correspondence with her husband, John." (165).

7. There are at least two references to the battle in the letters. The first is a letter sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in September 1877, on the occasion of the death of his wife: "She reminded me of the Thermopylae—Did she suffer—except to leave you? That was perhaps the sum of Death" (Dickinson 1958, 592). The second is to be found in a missive, sent on 19 July, 1884, to Mabel Loomis Todd: "How martial the Apology of Nature! We die, said the Deathless of Thermopylae, in obedience to Law" (Dickinson 1958, 826).

8. "[A]lmost immediately, contemporary Greeks saw Thermopylae as a critical moral and culture lesson. In universal terms, a small, free people had willingly outfought huge numbers of imperial subjects who advanced under the lash. More specifically, the Western idea that soldiers themselves decide where, how, and against whom they will fight was contrasted against the Eastern notion of despotism and monarchy—freedom proving the stronger idea as the more courageous fighting of the Greeks at Thermopylae, and their later victories at Salamis and Plataea attested." Victor David Hanson on http://www.300spartanwarriors.com/thermopylaeauthors/victordavishanson.html This, as Winterer notes, seems not to have been lost on the orators at the consecration of Gettysburg Cemetery: "The dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg in 1863 provided the opportunity to cast the Civil War as a battle that was Greek in its nobility and meaning. If the American Revolution had been cast in the language of Roman antiquity, the Civil War would be the victory of brave Greeks against the almost overwhelming forces of 'Oriental' Persia in 490 [*sic*] BCE. This feat was accomplished not by Abraham Lincoln in his famously terse, three-minute 'Dedication Remarks' [...], but, instead, in the fluid, Latinate amblings of Edward Everett's two-hour 'Oration,' which preceded Lincoln's short speech" (Winterer 2007, 188).

9. One will note multiples echoes of Fr 524 in Fr 668 (Shame/Disgrace, Brave Man, Brave, Pelf, feels, etc.), written the same year:

There is a Shame of Nobleness –
Confronting Sudden Pelf –
A finer Shame of Ecstasy –
Convicted of Itself –

A best Disgrace – a Brave Man feels –
Acknowledged – of the Brave –
One More – "Ye Blessed" – to be told –
But that's – Behind the Grave – (Fr 668)

10. See, for example, Fr 419, where death is "Of Earl and Midge / The Privilege", or, Fr 545, with soldiers dropping "like the Petals from a Rose."

11. Whitman, in "The Wound-dresser," made amputation the central metaphor for the country's internal conflict (cf. http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1881/poems/).

12. "[N]onrecoverable deletions," Cristanne Miller notes, "may serve primarily to increase the density of a poem. It may also affect a poem's meaning more directly, by creating a syntactic or logical ambiguity" (Miller 1989, 18).

13. The most telling moment in that respect is found in the following passage: "'I heard this same Lysidas, the other day,' said Philæmon, boasting that the Spartans were the only real freemen; and Lacedæmon the only place where courage and virtue always found a sure reward. I asked him what reward the Helots had for bravery or virtue. 'They are not scourged; and that is sufficient reward for the base hounds,' was his contemptuous reply. He approves the law forbidding masters to bestow freedom on their slaves; and likes the custom which permits boys to whip them, merely to remind them of their bondage. He ridicules the idea that injustice will weaken the strength of Sparta, because the gods are enemies to injustice. He says the sun of liberty shines brighter with the dark atmosphere of slavery around it; as temperance seems more lovely to the Spartan youth, after they have seen the Helots made beastly drunk for their amusement. He seems to forget that the passions are the same in every human breast; and that it is never wise in any state to create natural enemies at her own doors. But the Lacedæmonians make it a rule never to speak of danger from their slaves. They remind me of the citizens of Amyclæ, who, having been called from their occupations by frequent rumours of war, passed a vote that no man should be allowed, under heavy penalties, to believe any report of intended invasion. When the enemy really came, no man dared to speak of their approach, and Amyclæ was easily conquered. Lysidas boasted of salutary cruelty; and in the same breath told me the Helots loved their masters" (Child 1836, 113).

14. To this detail must added the death, in March, 1862—Dickinson calls it the murder—of Frazer Stearns, the son of the President of Amherst College, and a friend of Austin's (cf. Letter 256, in Dickinson 1958, 398-399).

15. Hundreds of women did famously enrol as soldiers while passing themselves off as men. Female nurses volunteered in the thousands. Women spoke in meetings on both sides of the conflict. But they were still excluded from any political decision-making affecting the course of the war. One of the arenas left open to them, as Winterer reminds us, was that of public debates: "'As it had in the revolutionary period, the classical world helped structure some of the major national debates of the Civil War era. Far more than they could ever have been in the eighteenth century, women were now major participants in these debates'" (Winterer 2007, 190).

16. Cf. Fr 180, 311, 569, 887, 1094, and 1577.

17. The quatrain in which those two variants are to be found is "Antiquest felt at noon / When August burning low / Arise this spectral Canticle / Repose to vivify" (Fr 895).

18. "The Lilac is an ancient shrub / But ancienter than that / The Firmamental Lilac / Upon the Hill tonight" (Fr...).

19. Fr 180's "Antique trinket" may find an antithetical echo in Fr 289's "Ancient Brooch."

20. Dickinson's fondness for stress ambiguity can be seen at least twice to bear on the adjective "present," as at the end of Fr 524 or, perhaps more famously, in the first quatrain of Fr 409: "The Soul selects her own Society – Then shuts the Door – To her divine Majority – Present no more." While the iambic reading of "present" makes more sense metrically in the two instances, the meaning appears more consistent with the rest of both poems when the word is read as an adjective, and therefore as a trochee.

21. In Thomas H. Johnson's edition of the poems, Fr 1577 comes after a belated mock-Transcendentalist quatrain: "Who has not found the Heaven – below – / Will fail of it above – / For Angels rent the House next ours, / Wherever we remove – "

22. In that respect, those lines are reminiscent of Fr 721, which concludes that "'Nature' is what We know – / But have no Art to say – / So impotent our Wisdom is / To Her Sincerity."

23. Gloria Shaw Duclos regards Higginson's fictional Sappho as a woman embodying "a contest between two social systems," with Lesbos serving as a haven to the kind of woman the Homeric-Aeolian system had until then honoured and encouraged, as against the more overtly patriarchal Ionian-Athenian system. Yet, according to Higginson, Sappho's contemporary equivalent was not to be found in Emily Dickinson but in Harriet Beecher Stowe (Duclos 1984, 406-407).

24. "Like her great contemporaries," Sewall notes, "she had the Orphic urge to wake up a sleeping world, to arouse her fellow mortals to the joys of living. She soon found, apparently, that these strains were not her permanent voice. But there is more than a hint of the Orphic in her later attitudes" (Sewall 1974, 691).
25. The poem is the gender-oriented Fr 381, whose final quatrain reads "Nor any know I know the Art / I mention – easy – Here – / Nor any Placard boast me – / It's full as Opera –"
26. It may not be a coincidence that the first two operas ever to be composed—Peri's *Euridice* (1600), and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607)—were devoted to Orpheus.

ABSTRACTS

The article discusses Dickinson as seizing upon the classics and the Latin language as correctives to the long lasting impact of Calvinism upon her cultural environment. It seeks to offer Dickinson's classical references as the expression of a gendered approach to her society's most crucial issues, namely slavery, war, and the role of women in the public sphere. All of which questions find a resolution of sort in her appropriation of the Orphic voice in her later poems.

Cet article se propose de relire l'utilisation par Dickinson des classiques et de la langue latine comme un correctif, voire un antidote, apporté à l'héritage calviniste qui a si lourdement pesé sur son milieu. Au fil d'allusions mythologiques ou historiques, sa poésie fait montre d'une conscience aiguë des enjeux de son époque, l'esclavage, la guerre, le rôle des femmes dans la sphère publique, qu'elle aborde par le biais d'une stratégie genrée qui culmine dans une posture orphique.

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